DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 120 382 CE 006 590

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TITLE Research Focus on Ethnic Minorities in Vocational Education.
PUB DATE Dec 75
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the American Vocational Association Annual Convention (Anaheim, California, December 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Educational Problems; *Educational Research; Educational Researchers; *Minority Groups; Racial Factors; *Research Needs; *Research Problems; Research Utilization; *Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

In his paper, the author contends that ethnic minority groups must use the "weapon of research" to answer some of the unanswered questions in vocational education and to give guidance toward future corrections of these problems. But the topic is emotionally charged, as intensive research in the past has generated resentment among minorities. The keys to successful research, therefore, are relevance and constructive output, and the notion of conducting research as a bloodless, unemotional, and objective procedure is challenged. Six concerns are addressed by the author: (1) What is the current status of ethnic minorities in vocational education research? (2) How realistic is the research and development model in solving the educational problems of minorities? (3) To what extent might the interpretation of data by whites provide erroneous conclusions due to ignorance about the black referent? (4) How effective is vocational education in serving blacks, in particular, and ethnic minorities in general? (5) Is research emphasis on ethnic minorities in vocational education related to social-political activity? and (6) What kind of research is taking place in vocational education with the focus on minorities? Seven problems in the conduct of research in vocational education on ethnic minorities are briefly outlined. (Author/AJ)

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RESEARCH FOCUS ON ETHNIC MINORITIES IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION[1]

FEB 26 1976

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Introduction

The topic Research Focus on Ethnic Minorities in Vocational Education is one which is fraught with pros and cons and there are those who question the fact that there is such a thing as research that is relevant to one particular population as opposed to another. In general, there is agreement that research and development as it relates to dealing with problems among ethnic minorities in general, and, in particular, Blacks is primarily involved in value dilemmas. In the area of problem identification or needs assessment, for example, information on public desires and reactions to educational improvement often are fraught with the relevant question, "Who is doing the asking?" "Who is being asked?" "For what purpose?" "For what end?" The panel this afternoon is structured to attempt to address the following concerns:

1. What are the major research issues pertinent to the design and development of vocational education programs for minorities?
2. What research, if any, has been used to improve vocational programs for ethnic minorities?
3. What research, if any, is needed that would help facilitate ethnic minority participation, involvement and success in vocational education programs?
4. What methods are most effective in the dissemination of research findings wherein such dissemination is crucial to the success of ethnic minority students in vocational education?

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[1]Paper presented at the American Vocational Association Annual Convention, Anaheim, California, December, 1975.

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5. To what extent, is there current and/or existing R & D going on that focuses on the needs of ethnic minority students in vocational education?

This symposium has general applications for many ethnic minorities in Vocational Education, i.e., Native Americans, Chicanos, Orientals and Appalachian poor whites. But more specifically this symposium has particular implications for Black Americans. This point is expressed to make clear that we're not assuming minority groups to be monolithic. All too often this has been a repeated mistake in the past, and to some extent still true today in the design of vocational programs. Ethnic minorities have much in common (i.e., high degree of socio-economic deprivation, discrimination, abused equality of educational opportunity and the like). Yet, these target populations differ; they do not constitute homogeneous groups. Ethnic minorities have much in common, but also they have differences. What works in the design of vocational programs for some won't necessarily work for all; however, again, the approach of this seminar will be that looking at research concerns applicable to most minorities and specific concerns more unique to the black clientele.

It is my candid opinion that just as ethnic minorities in general, and Blacks in particular, have to use the Weapon of Freedom--"The Law" to combat oppression and discrimination--the Weapon of Research must be used to answer some of the unanswered questions in vocational education and give guidance toward future corrections of these problems. It would appear to me that the "Weapon of Research" is needed. We have to use it. BUT, it must be relevant. Minorities, especially Blacks have been <u>researched</u>, <u>researched</u> and <u>researched</u>. This is a subliminal emotion that is often displayed by the minority referent. There is a sense of "Hell no, no more!!!" unless there is some constructive

output on the other end. Thus the topic of research focus on ethnic minorities in vocational education is one fraught paradoxically with emotion. Hence the notion of conducting research as a bloodless, unemotional, and objective procedure is seriously challenged.

Concerns and/or Issues

1. What is the Current Status of Ethnic Minorities in Vocational Education Research? We can take several approaches to the status of research focus on ethnic minorities in vocational education. First, we certainly can celebrate the fact that minority group membership in AERA has increased and to some extent, but still very small, in AVERA; and that we have numerous Blacks and increasingly large numbers of Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, and Native American Brothers and Sisters involved in some kind of research. However, again the numbers are still somewhat discouraging in vocational education. Secondly, we could also review the content of some of the research contributions of ethnic minorities to public school vocational programs, characteristics of targated ethnic populations, aspects of self-concept and personality in skill training programs, the effects of general education on vocational education/manpower programs, the study of language differences and non-standard dialects among minorities in vocational education and the study of effective teaching strategies. Thirdly, we could avoid celebration and commendation and focus on criticism; it may be that we need to look at and applaud our progress and call attention to the real serious problems facing large numbers of ethnic minorities in vocational education.
2. How Realistic is the R & D Model in Solving the Educational Problems of Minorities? A problem should be identified, systematic investigation

into possible causes of that problem to be conducted. The results of those investigations should point to alternative processes or products which could be developed to possibly alleviate the problem. Those products then should be tested, retested, modified and then based upon the results of those tests—one or more of them should be selected and evaluated under actual use conditions with the population of clients for whom it was developed. Given positive results from this evaluation, plans would be developed to produce, disseminate and implement the resulting product or program. It is rather obvious that education has not taken this route to problem solving. Although an R & D approach to problem solving is generally espoused in education, the usual practice has been to identify a problem followed by the cause and then propose a solution generally without benefit of sufficient data. No where is this more obvious than in the areas concerned with the education of the student who is not white and middle class. Using what might be an oversimplified example for purposes of illustration, the great interest in remedial or compensatory education programs come immediately to mind. A problem was identified that problem being Black children who were not achieving in the regular classroom. A cause was identified—the inadequacy of those children, low IQ scores, negative self-concepts, poor home conditions and poor achievement levels were used as examples of that inadequacy. A solution then was proposed; give those children more of the same instruction which take place during the six hours of regular school, only now have it happen after school hours or during summer or schedule cultural activities to make up for the inadequacies of those children. First and foremost, the R & D model was only minimally followed before the decision was made to launch the many compensatory education programs. To be sure

there was a research base of sorts that existed to help guide educators to that decision. However, the nature of that research base should be explored for just a few minutes. During the era of the turbulent 60's, a great deal of research was conducted on the Black population, especially the Black child. The impact and general circulation of three major research reports standout: (1) The Moyniham Report (Moyniham, 1965), (2) The Coleman Report (Coleman, 1962), and (3) The Jencks Report (Jencks et.al., 1972). The majority of the researchers conducting those investigations used one of two philosophical or theoretical positions as the basis for their research--(1) A Deficit Model or, (2) A Cultural Different Model. It is not the intention here to discuss the relative merits or lack thereof of these models. It is sufficient to say that both models focus on various attributes of the Black student as the best possible explanation of his or her own failures and completely ignored the many other possible explanations. This has been especially true in vocational education. In addition to the highly suspect research models in studying minorities in general, and Blacks in particular, we must add the possible bias of the many white researchers in the interpretation of the research findings. Given the lack of adherence to an R & D model, failure was practically insured. Not only was the research in a vacuum, there was no data available to suggest that compensation would have any affect on achievement.

The compensatory programs are not unique in the context of this discussion. Almost any program, including vocational education could be used for illustration in failing to use sound underlying research and development process. The net result is that the problems identified in the education of Blacks in the 1960's still exist, for the most part, in 1975.

Blacks are still graduating from high school without acquiring basic reading and computational skills, Blacks are still being assigned to special education classes without proper assessment of their abilities, Black males are still being pushed out of school to become statistics and dropouts from school districts. Of course, some of these problems are directly contributable to racism in America and therefore the R & D model may not be an appropriate model for their solution. However, there are problems which still exist in the schools and across programs for which this model is highly appropriate—those problems should be tackled immediately. Researchers who are interested in using the R & D model in helping to solve the vocational and educational problems of minority persons, must first begin by examining indepth traditional research models. If old models are found to be inadequate then new models of research must be developed--models which take into account reality, as it exists for minority and/or Black persons. Armed with these models systematic investigation of school environments, including vocational education programs, teaching strategies, instructional materials, student attitudes, interactions of minority students with minority faculty members and interactions of minority students with white faculty members should begin, these data could serve the ultimate aim of providing information based upon sound facts for those would develop programs, processes and/or products which could be disseminated and implemented to eliminate those forces which inhibit learning among Black students, cause negative attitudes and affect the success and performance of Blacks in vocational programs. If the R & D model was strictly adhered to there would be laboratory testing followed by field testing that would provide informa-

tion as to the effectiveness of those newly developed products. If the educational community is serious about solving the problems that seem to exist in educating the black, brown, or red child, the R & D model provides an excellent opportunity to begin looking at root causes of problems and thereby coming up with solutions which treat the causes rather than just their symptoms. Even though the process of R & D is a long and expensive one the cost does not begin to compare with the irretrievable lost potential of blacks and other minorities in the educational system.

3. <u>To What Extent Might the Interpretation of Data by Whites Provide Erroneous Conclusions Due to Ignorance About the Black Referent?</u> Vocational educators need to be apprised of the unique characteristics of various ethnic minorities as an important intervening variable in the data collection process. In several psychological studies, it has been noted that the race of the interviewer is, in itself, an important factor (Katz, 1964; Rankin and Campbell, 1954). Most recently (Picou, 1973; and Picou and Campbell, 1975) have offered revealing evidence of the need for data collection alternatives for the Black respondent. For traditional survey research settings, minority respondents (including Blacks) have been found to give more socially desirable and socially acceptable responses in studies directed by white interviewers (Athey, 1960; Hyman, 1954; Summers and Hammonds, 1966).

Evidence exists on many other dimensions concerning the potential biasing effect of the interview situation. Sex, age and social status have all been found to affect respondents' patterns of behavior in the research setting (Ehrlich and Riesman, 1961; Friedman, 1967; Lenski and

Leggett, 1960). Furthermore, it has been pretty well established that factors such as physical setting and subject attributes may also be sources of bias in data collection techniques (Crowne and Marlowe, 1964; and Rosenberg, 1969).

An illustration of differences in the interpretation of data collected can be shown in the following example. Using proven research methodology a white researcher at the University of Tennessee developed proper rater reliability and analyzed video tapes of behavior in a classroom. The researcher was studying race differences in communication. The researcher and staff were very pleased with the results; however, a black student in the graduate program expressed a desire to view the tapes and make an analysis of the communication differences. Using proven research methodology, she established with black raters proper reliability and analyzed those tapes. The results were different. Now we've got an interesting problem. Here the proven technique of R & D, of rater reliability is different. Well it is a simple matter of there being a difference between blacks and whites look at the same issue. The results here were so strikingly different. So it is not how we interpret the data but rather the very question asked. The first time was from the white point of view and could have been very well the right question. The second time the question was from the Black point of view. At this point we should be able to close the R & D cycle. Blacks and whites indeed saw it differently. But to complete the cycle we have to put blacks and whites together and find out why it was different. Then we have to apply those. In many times you see we only go so far in the R & D model as the "R" and don't pick up the "D". Now once we can find out why they're different, and certainly we can't remove the

value questions--BUT once we find out why they're different then perhaps we can develop strategies and procedures to bring it together.

4. How Effective is Vocational Education in Serving Blacks, In Particular, and Ethnic Minorities in General? It is not only important to know the numbers and percent of a particular minority enrolled in vocational education at each level; the numbers and percentages of that minority in each occupational program or cluster should be known as a basis of comparison with other groups. It seems important, for evaluation and research purposes, that the same data should be available for completions and dropouts, with and without employment entry skills, and for placement or unemployment following completion. Until these kinds of information are available nationally, and by geographic and economic areas, an adequate knowledge of the effectiveness of vocational education in serving various ethnic minorities or target populations is not possible.

5. Is Research Emphasis on Ethnic Minorities in Vocational Education Related to Social-Political Activity? Education in any society and particularly ours, in a predominantly white society which is oppressive against minorities is a social-political question. Therefore the nature, scope, content and use of the research is directly a function of that social-political context. This, of course, has spilled over and dramatically affects all research focus on ethnic minorities in the general education sector as well as the vocational education sector.

6. What Kind of Research is Taking Place in Vocational Education With the Focus on Minorities? The majority of research studies on ethnic minorities in vocational education may be categorized as descriptive or survey

research. Very little, if any, of the studies appeared to be replications.

Although numerous variables have been identified that should facilitate minority student success in vocational programs, almost no efforts through experimental research has attempted to manipulate and control these variables.

It appears that the bulk of the research on ethnic minorities being generated at present is concentrated in a very few states.

Much of the research generated concerning ethnic minorities has been on attitudes of ethnic minorities towards vocational education, with some indications that there may be certain attraction-avoidance patterns noticeable in vocational enrollments of ethnic minorities. Haeger (1974) cited as examples: the under-representation of Blacks in Distributive Education, the over-representation of Blacks in health occupations and the under-representation of Spanish Americans in Agriculture and Health Occupations.

It appears that much of the present research is concentrated on the disadvantaged population, and unfortunately, these results are being generalized to ethnic minority populations from all socio-economic levels. In our efforts to improve the educational and/or vocational services of the students we serve, we tend to overgeneralize, falsely classify and stereotype. We tend to use the terms "minority" and "disadvantaged" interchangeably as though they are synonymous. This is a mistake. Ethnic minorities can be found at all socio-economic levels. Granted proportionately speaking, a higher number of Blacks, Chicanos, Native Americans and Puerto Ricans can be found in this group. Likewise, it is equally

fallacious to assume that only members of ethnic minorities are "poor" "powerless" "hopeless" and "disadvantaged."

Problems In the Conduct of Research in Vocational Education on Ethnic Minorities

I. Most of the available research on vocational education for Blacks, especially urban Blacks seem to fall into four areas:

1. Characteristics of Inner-City and/or Rural Blacks
2. Public School Vocational Education Programs
3. Post-Secondary and/or Adult Level Skill Training Programs
4. Special Needs Programs (i.e., disadvantaged, handicapped, etc.)

There is a definite need to expand future research efforts, i.e. impact of vocational education in inner cities, the social mobility of ethnic minorities, etc.

II. Lack of impact research.

III. Lack of adequate funds for conducting major research studies.

IV. Considerable duplication of data.

For every one study, there appears to be many others presenting approximately the same information. Quite obviously, this suggests that the vocational education researcher should not take refuge in the number of works available as an indication of how complete data on the ethnic minorities are.

V. Lack of substantial national data which severely limits the generalizability of results from vocational education research studies to other areas. Local studies are needed but in too many instances, unwarranted assumptions and conclusions have been derived from such data and have been grossly misleading on a broader basis.

VI. Lack of control, comparison or criterion groups. The lack of control groups has been particularly lacking in vocational education in compari-

scn to manpower studies. Until studies start to make greater use of comparable ethnic minority groups to evaluate vocational education programs, there will be little meaningful information on the impact of programs serving these particular groups.

VII. Although there is a percentage increase, the number of minority researchers in vocational education is still woefully small. For the most part, this is true in all of education. Specific steps need to be taken for the inclusion of more minorities in educational research. In vocational education, AVERA can lend support and encouragement for greater participation of ethnic minorities in vocational education research.

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